

The Return of the Service

Story by SPC Rachael Tolliver

FOLLOWING U.S. troop deployments to Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, people across America again tied yellow ribbons around trees and prominently displayed U.S. flags.

But a little-known tradition that honors military personnel in times of war and conflict has yet to make any noticeable appearance — display of the service flag.

Sometimes called the “Son in Service” flag, it was first displayed during World War I and became a popular symbol of support in the homes of military service members and their families throughout the nation during World War II.

CPT Robert Queissner of the 5th Ohio Infantry is credited with starting the service flag tradition. He made a small flag to display in his home to honor his two sons who fought on the front lines in Europe in World War I.

The flag was white with a red border and included two blue stars in the middle, one representing each son.

The flag idea caught on and, thereafter, became the unofficial symbol of a child in service.

Keith Gillan of Watertown, N.Y., a sergeant in the Army Air Forces during World War II, said: “It meant a lot to the soldiers to know the flags were displayed in their homes. And neighbors appreciated knowing who had a family member serving the country, so they could lend support to the family.”

The service flag is authorized by the Department of Defense to be displayed by Americans to honor their family members who are serving in the U.S. armed forces during any period of conflict or war, whether the soldier is deployed or remains on U.S. soil.

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Since World War II, however, the service flag has rarely been seen and few people in America know what the flag is, or what it represents. After the war, the service flag fell by the wayside, probably due to a lack of support from Americans for the wars that followed, said Kathy Vairo, co-owner of Battle Born Industries and **ServiceFlags.com**.

thought this would be a great way to support the military,” she said.

ServiceFlags.com was the first company to manufacture the Service flags, Vairo said, and in December 2001 only three companies in the United States manufactured the symbol of service.

During World War II the Department of War issued specifications for

Patriotism Buttons

THE Defense Department also authorizes the manufacture and wear of a gold star lapel button and a service lapel button. The GSLB is a gold star on a purple disk surrounded by a wreath of gold laurel leaves. It may be worn by the family members of a soldier killed in combat.

Those authorized to display the service flag are also authorized to wear the SLB. However, while the flag may show as many stars as family members serving, the button may show only one star. A gold star is not authorized as part of the SLB as it is on the service flag. — SPC Rachael Tolliver



While some families chose to display the service flag during the Vietnam War, Vairo said, most didn't, and few even knew of its existence. The very popular Operation Desert Storm, on the other hand, was a brief engagement. “So World War II is really the last time the service flag was displayed throughout the United States.”

After the Sept. 11 attacks on America and the start of troop deployments to Afghanistan, Vairo and her brother, David Smith, decided to manufacture service flags. “We

manufacturing the flag and button, as well as guidelines indicating when the flag could be displayed and who could display it.

Then, in the 1960s, DOD revised previous regulations and specifications. According to information on the Web site **www.gideonflags.com**, these guidelines are outlined in DOD Directive 348.20 and 1348.33-M, “Manual of Military Decorations and Awards.” The specifics can be found on pages 88 through 93 in the 1996 version.

The service flag may also be

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Flag

displayed by organizations to honor members of the organization who are serving in the armed forces.

The flag is designed to be displayed indoors, facing out of the home's or organization's front window, Vairo said. When the U.S. flag is also displayed, it should take the place of honor above the service flag and should be as large or larger.

A gold star should be placed over the service flag's blue star if a family member is killed during a war or conflict. The gold star takes a position of honor closest to the staff and is slightly smaller than the blue star, giving the gold star a blue border, Vairo said. In 1918 the name "Gold Star Mothers" was given to women who had lost children in the armed services.

Family members authorized to display the service flag include spouses, parents, step-parents, adoptive and foster parents, children, stepchildren, adopted children, siblings, and half brothers and half sisters of a member of the U.S. armed services.

Grandparents are not currently authorized to display the flag, Vairo said.

Local retailers and military post exchanges don't sell the service flag. But Sharon Campbell, manager of Military Clothing and Sales at Fort Drum, N.Y., said the service flag may be ordered online at www.annin.com. Representatives at Annin said they're manufacturing the flag with DOD authorization.

AAFES military insignia buyer Ray Howard said AAFES is researching the service flag and waiting for approval to sell it. AAFES officials will then decide whether or not to include it in their inventory, he said.

"I believe the incidents that have happened in the last six months have brought this item back into the lime-light," Howard said.

For Americans, World War II



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started with the attack on Pearl Harbor, he said. Nearly 60 years later, the United States came under attack again, and once again families gave up their children to a war effort.

Americans now have the opportunity to revive tradition and display the service flag, showing their family's contribution to the war on terrorism, Howard said. □